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COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS
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Working Group on Indigenous Populations
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OTHER MATTERS

**REVIEW OF ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN UNDER
THE INTERNATIONAL DECADE OF THE WORLD'S
INDIGENOUS PEOPLE**

**Consultation and Training Workshop for Pygmy¹ Communities on
Human Rights, Development and Cultural Diversity in Cooperation
with ILO and UNESCO, 11-15 November 2002, Yaoundé and the
Dja Biosphere Reserve, Cameroon**

Note by the Secretariat

Introduction

1. In the light of the proposals made by the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at its first session, held from 13 to 24 May 2002, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), in cooperation with the United Nations Yaoundé Sub-regional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa as well as the International Labour

¹ The word “pygmy” is generally used to refer to the traditionally forest dwelling peoples of central African countries. However, it is a pejorative word most of the time used by other ethnic groups to mock or discriminate against them and therefore most of the concerned communities would prefer to be identified as Baka, Batwa, Yaka, Bagyeli, Bayanda, etc.

Organization (ILO) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), organized an inter-agency consultation for Pygmies from seven central African countries in Yaoundé and in the Mékas village in the Dja Biosphere Reserve, in Cameroon, from 11 to 15 November 2002. The Cameroon workshop was a follow-up to three previous workshops held in the United Republic of Tanzania, Mali and Botswana on “Multiculturalism in Africa: Peaceful and Constructive Group Accommodation in Situations Involving Minorities and Indigenous Peoples” and was envisaged as part of a process of consultation that would help OHCHR develop a strategic approach to indigenous issues in Africa. Reports of the three seminars are contained in documents E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2000/WP.3, E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/2001/3 and E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.4/2002/4.

2. The Cameroon workshop provided an opportunity for Pygmy peoples from Burundi, Rwanda, the Central African Republic, Gabon, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Congo and Cameroon to meet, share their experiences and concerns, and make recommendations to the United Nations system on how best to address their issues. It was the first time that the United Nations has organized a workshop with representatives of Pygmies from all countries in which they live.

3. The workshop was envisaged with a view to achieving the following objective:

(a) To continue the cooperation with grass-roots indigenous organizations, to acknowledge their marginalized situation and strengthen their capacity to address their issues at the national and international levels;

(b) To strengthen inter-agency cooperation on indigenous issues. The previous workshop in Botswana was organized in cooperation with the country offices of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), UNESCO, ILO and headquarters staff from the World Health Organization. The Cameroon workshop was developed as a joint initiative of OHCHR, ILO and UNESCO and received financial support and staff participation from the three organizations, including from headquarters and local offices;

(c) To promote consultation with the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. As the Cameroon consultation was entirely devoted to issues pertaining to Pygmy communities, Mr. Zephyrin Kalimba, a Batwa from Rwanda, in his capacity as indigenous expert of the Working Group of Experts on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples or Ethnic Communities in Africa of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights was invited;

(d) To further mainstream indigenous peoples' issues into the work of OHCHR by involving the Office's Sub-regional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. The Centre contributed to the preparation of the workshop and the organization of a consultation, facilitated by the UNDP country office, involving the participants, United Nations agencies and OHCHR. It also supported the activity financially and technically;

(e) To promote cooperation with the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. In this respect, the African governmental member of the Permanent Forum, Ms. Njuma Ekundanayao, herself from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, contributed to the consultation by explaining the pioneering role of the new United Nations body;

(f) To stimulate and facilitate a dialogue between indigenous peoples and the Government. An official of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Cameroon, in charge of the liaison with non-governmental organizations, attended the training workshop in the Dja Biosphere Reserve on behalf of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

The Workshop

First part: Interactive consultation on United Nations activities pertaining to Pygmy communities at the Sub-regional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy, Yaoundé, 11 November 2002

4. The workshop included an introduction for participants representing Pygmy organizations on the role and mission of the United Nations Yaoundé Sub-regional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa. Mr. Teferra Shiawl-Kidanekal, head of the Centre, welcomed the participants and the United Nations agencies. The main objective of the Centre, he said, was to develop a culture of human rights and democracy in order to prevent conflict and promote sustainable peace and development in Central Africa. The Centre deploys its activities in 11 African countries: Cameroon, Angola, Burundi, Congo, Gabon, Equatorial Guinea, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Sao Tomé and Principe and Chad. The participants were informed that the Centre has developed internship programmes to reinforce subregional capacities in human rights and democracy.

5. An interactive session was led by UNDP with the participation of representatives of the headquarters offices of UNESCO, ILO and OHCHR, the Yaoundé offices of ILO and UNESCO, and the UNESCO office of Gabon. The United Nations agencies provided information on the activities they were carrying out to promote cultural diversity and protect rights pertaining to marginalized communities such as Pygmies. The ILO representatives underscored the fact that ILO Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries remained the only existing international instrument aiming at protecting indigenous and tribal peoples and said that so far no African country had ratified it. The UNESCO representatives described the programmes on intercultural dialogues that had been developed to promote the newly adopted Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity.

6. The participants were sceptical about any commitments made by their Governments with regard to Pygmies. They also stressed the lack of education among Pygmies and their ignorance of indigenous rights. They stated that they were underrepresented in the political and administrative areas. Several participants stressed that the lack of self-esteem of Pygmies, who were regarded as inferior by some other groups in Africa, was also a critical issue. They deplored the lack of official recognition of issues related to Pygmies which affected policy formulation.

Second part: Interactive training session on human rights, culture and development, Mékas, Dja Biosphere Reserve, South Province of Cameroon, 13 and 14 November 2002

7. A training workshop and consultations were held in the Mékas village, in the Dja Biosphere Reserve, where Pygmies from several local communities in the Reserve had the opportunity to speak about their situation and issues. The President of the Association pour le développement du Dja said that his organization was pleased to be sponsoring the workshop and he welcomed the representatives of the United Nations system and the participants to the Dja Reserve. The training session was opened by Mr. George Bekono, representative of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Cameroon, the Deputy Mayor of Bengbis and the Pygmy traditional chief of the Dja Reserve.

Training component

8. The representative of OHCHR gave background information about how indigenous peoples' issues were dealt with by the United Nations and referred to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations and the working group on a draft declaration on the rights of indigenous peoples. He also provided information on activities of the Office relating to indigenous peoples, including the Indigenous Fellowship Programme proposed to indigenous youth, and community-based projects. The governmental African expert of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues spoke about the outcome of the first session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues. She explained that the mandate of this new advisory body was to provide advice on indigenous issues to the Economic and Social Council and, through the Council, to the United Nations system.

9. The representative of ILO explained the main philosophy and provisions of ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention (No. 169). This Convention adopts an attitude of respect for the cultures, customs and traditions, and ways of life of indigenous and tribal peoples. In order to realize this philosophy, Convention No. 169 requires that indigenous and tribal peoples be consulted on issues affecting them, and that they should be able to engage in free and informed participation in policy development, or other processes that affect them. The Convention is currently recognized as the foremost instrument on the subject. Giving examples, she showed how it has been used as a reference for national policies and laws on indigenous peoples, as well as for policies of international organizations and other bodies in this regard. It is also used by indigenous peoples themselves as a guideline for negotiation and dialogue, and as a tool in the promotion and protection of their rights. She also presented the Project to Promote ILO Policy on Indigenous and Tribal Peoples. This project promotes Convention No. 169 and provides capacity-building for indigenous and tribal peoples.

10. The representative of UNESCO explained the Organization's programmes to revitalize cultural identities as a way to promote sustainable development. He referred to the first intergovernmental meeting of experts on the draft Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, held from 23 to 27 September 2002 at the UNESCO headquarters. UNESCO, he said, was playing a leading role in protecting and promoting intangible heritage.

11. The representatives of the country offices of UNESCO and ILO provided information on their experiences regarding community-based projects for Pygmies in Gabon and Cameroon, respectively. The UNESCO representative referred to a pioneering project with San people in South Africa, which was expanded in Gabon for Pygmies from seven provinces. The ILO field office in Cameroon provided information about a pilot project on sustainable development with the Pygmies in Cameroon, which was developed within the framework of the ILO/INDISCO Programme.

Consultation

12. Following the presentations, the floor was opened for comments and questions from the participants. Participants in the Dja Biosphere Reserve expressed concerns about the absence of local transport and accessible roads that effectively left the community isolated from the rest of the country. They called for the construction of an all-weather road that would allow them to market their products and travel in search of work. Speakers representing the Pygmy community said that they faced severe marginalization with respect to development, health, access to education and work opportunities. Also, they underlined the fact that the recognition of the Dja as a nature reserve had led to the prohibition of hunting. Several Pygmy participants further observed that forest communities were the most neglected and forgotten segment of their respective societies. They said they constituted a neglected social class, very often regarded as inferior peoples. Most of them had no identity cards and were therefore deprived of the enjoyment of fundamental rights. The participants noted the lack of willingness on the part of policy makers to recognize the cultural identities, knowledge and skills of Pygmy communities. They said that the traditional knowledge of Pygmies was not respected and that they were excluded from the management and conservation of forests. In this respect, the representative of the World Conservation Union (IUCN)-Regional office for Central Africa gave information about an upcoming subregional forum as a follow-up to the Fourth Conference on Central African Moist Forest Ecosystems, held in Kinshasa in June 2002. The objective was to support the participation of indigenous peoples, in particular Pygmy communities, in sustainable management of Central African forest ecosystems.

13. Within the context of the ILO presentation, questions from participants pertained primarily to land rights in the Dja Reserve, vis-à-vis its status as a biosphere reserve and UNESCO-protected world heritage site. This is a question that remains pertinent to many thousands of indigenous and tribal peoples communities throughout the world, but in the Dja Reserve is complicated by the fact that there are two main communities (Bantou and Pygmy) inhabiting the reserve, one of which is discriminated against and, in some cases, exploited by the other.

14. Another issue that was raised in the questions, and one that will require more clarification if further work to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples is to take place in Cameroon, is the definition of "indigenous" people as the term is currently understood in Cameroon. This is often a difficult question in Africa.

15. Concluding the session, Mr. George Bekono, the representative of the Ministry for Foreign Affairs of the host country, informed the participants and the United Nations agencies that the Government was undertaking preliminary consideration in relation to the possible ratification of ILO Convention No. 169. He also acknowledged the need for the Government to adopt a more participatory dialogue in its decision-making processes in relation to Pygmies.

Recommendations by the indigenous Pygmies

16. The Pygmy representatives met in private sessions during the workshop and made observations, suggestions and proposals which were presented to OHCHR and the United Nations agencies and are summarized as follows.

Human rights and cultural diversity

- Cultural diversity in Africa should be protected as it constitutes a key factor for social, economic and environmental development;
- Impact on cultural identity should be fully considered prior to development projects affecting local Pygmy communities;
- Effective participation in decision-making processes should be guaranteed;
- All Pygmies of school age should be enrolled;
- Education on human rights should be provided in local languages;
- National, regional and international intercultural exchanges should be promoted.

Culture and development

- Policies governing the utilization and management of natural resources should be examined with respect to cultural value systems;
- Community-based strategies that integrate Pygmy knowledge in natural resources conservation and management should be promoted;
- Local Pygmy communities should be the direct beneficiaries of the income that accrues from the exploitation of resources.

Land and sustainable development

- Local and practical skills should be revitalized;
- Forest protection should include and not marginalize food security for Pygmies;
- No project affecting forest communities should be prepared or conducted without consultation with the local communities;

- Rural radio programmes in local languages should be supported in a long-term perspective to provide opportunities to Pygmy communities to participate in grass-roots development;
- Pygmy communities that were displaced from their traditional land and deprived of their natural medicine should be resettled in their homeland.

Conclusions and follow-up activities

17. Pygmy communities are subject to widespread and serious violations of human rights. This has a serious impact on their rights to education, health and fair labour conditions, among other things. It was emphasized by the indigenous participants that priority should be in capacity-building and education as a first step in ensuring that these communities are not exploited and taken advantage of by others claiming to represent their needs.

18. It was considered that follow-up activities are required to improve the protection of the human rights situation of Pygmies. In particular, following consultations with the participants, OHCHR undertook to assist Pygmy communities:

- (a) To develop a network of Pygmy organizations. The Office will send full contact details to all participants to promote cooperation between Pygmy communities of Central African region;
- (b) To seek funding from the United Nations Voluntary Fund for the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People for local, national and subregional projects;
- (c) To take part in activities organized by the Office, including in further seminars on multiculturalism in Africa;
- (d) To encourage applications to the Voluntary Fund for Indigenous Populations;
- (e) To promote better understanding of their situation by organizing a follow-up activity with the Sub-regional Centre for Human Rights and Democracy in Central Africa in cooperation with State representatives;
- (f) To make use of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights by organizing a joint activity with the Commission, in particular with its Working Group on Indigenous Peoples/Communities in Africa.

19. It was decided that the report on the activities of the workshop would be provided to the Working Group on Indigenous Populations at its twenty-first session and a summary and conclusions to the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues at its second session.

Annex

List of participants

The Government of Cameroon

Mr. George Bekono, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

OHCHR

OHCHR, Geneva: Mr. Julian Burger, Ms. Samia Slimane

OHCHR Regional Office in Yaoundé: Mr. Shiawl-Kidanekal Teferra, Mr. Oumar Ba, Mr. Mwanasali Musifiky, Ms. Fatou Dieng Thiam, Ms. Dorothée Ndoh Ondobo

Specialized agencies

UNESCO, Paris: Mr. Frédéric Vacheron

UNESCO country office of Yaoundé, Cameroon: Ms. Régine Priso

UNESCO country office of Libreville, Gabon: Mr. Michel E. Kenmoe

ILO, Geneva: Francesca Thornberry

ILO Area Office/Multi-disciplinary Team (MDT) in Yaoundé: Mr. Joseph Jean Marie Momo

UNDP country office in Yaoundé: Mr. Marcellin Ndong Ntah

Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues

Ms. Njuma Ekundanayao, African governmental member

Non-governmental organizations

Burundi

Unissons-nous pour la promotion des Batwa (UNIPROBA)

Mr. Vital Bambanze, Mr. Etienne Ndayishimiye

Cameroon

Mbororo Social and Cultural Development Association (MBOSCUDA)

Ms. Fadimatou Dahirou, Ms. Bouba Hawe

Association des Pygmées Baka/Abong-Mbang (Est-Cameroun)

Ms. Hélène Aye Mondo

Rural Women Environmental Protection Association

Ms. Rose Mbah

Centre de recherche et d'action pour le développement durable en Afrique Centrale (CERAD)

Mr. Patrice Bigombe Logo, Ms. Hélène Aye Mondo, Ms. Florence Augustine Mbazoa

Conférence sur les écosystèmes de forêts denses et humides d'Afrique Centrale (CEFDHAC)
Mr. Angu Angu Kenneth

L'Union mondiale pour la nature (UICN)
Mr. Cleto Ndikumagenge

Comité national d'action pour les droits de l'enfant et de la femme (CADEF)
Ms. Princese Odette Happy

Mr. Etienne Bissila, Pygmy representative of the Dja Reserve

Mr. Justin Bedoume, consultant

Central African Republic

Conseil International des Organisations de Festivals de Folklore et d'Arts Traditionnels (CIOFF)
Ms. Augustine Don-Ding, Ms. Pauline Mado Lembele

Les Amis de la Nature
Mr. Jonas Dacko, Ms. Henriette Biako

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Centre international de défense des droits des Batwa (CIDB) in Kinshasa
Mr. Prosper Nobirabo, Mr. Jean Mpia Bikopo, Ms. Marie-Roger Mondele

Comité paroissial de développement Kashofu (CPDK)
Barhwa Pygmies of Idjwi: Mr. Adrien Cishugi Kalanga, Ms. Colette Mawazo Bagaya,
Mr. Kakara Mupepa

Union pour l'émancipation de la femme autochtone (UEFA) in Bukavu RDC
Ms. Adolphine Muley

Centre d'accompagnement des autochtones pygmés et minoritaires vulnérables (CAMV)
Mr. Pacifique Mukumba Isumbisho

Association pour les droits de l'homme et l'univers carcéral (ADHUC) in Congo-Brazzaville
Mr. Moké Loamba, Mr. Justin Kakule, Ms. Christie Yelessa, Mr. Ifondo Nico

Union pour le développement des minorités Ekonda (UDME)
Ms. Jolie Etumu Mola

Gabon

Minorités autochtones Pygmées du Gabon (MINAPYGA)

Mr. Léonard Fabrice Odambo-Adone

Promotion et revalorisation des cultures en voie de disparition (PRECED)

Mr. Théodore Kiki Mouzegouth, Mr. Raoul Ndotche, Ms. Hélène Nze-Andane,

Mr. Denis Massande Makomba

Ms. Angele Revignet, Journalist

Rwanda

Communauté des autochtones Rwandais (CAURWA) in Kigali

Mr. Kalimba Zéphyrin

African Indigenous and Minority Peoples Organization (AIMPO)

Mr. Benon Mugarura

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